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ABSTRACT

Libraries and information centers are rapidly becoming an integral part of American Indian live. A primary concern of Indian people is the availability of dependable information on those issues and programs which directly affect their day to day lives. As the community information agency, the library plays a key role in improving access to local information. The library should concern itself with meeting the informational needs of individuals, the grass roots, by collecting, organizing, and disseminating information on local programs and issues, as they presently exist in the most objective and effecient means possible. In order to develop a successful information center, sound planning is required. Guide 8, part of a series of 11 guides designed to provide initial direction and alternatives to those planning or developing Indian library and information systems, gives a description of information centers and how to implement them in Indian communities. Topics covered are: types and location of information, organization and storage of information, and methods of dissemination. (NQ)

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Generating Information in Indian Libraries

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by
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PREFACE

Libraries and information centers are rapidly becoming an integral part of Indian life. Individuals, organizations, and tribes have come to the decision that libraries and the information services that they offer are necessary to meet Indian goals. These goals may vary widely, from improved access to education, cultural information, information on available social services, to leisure reading. They are all based in a component or institution designed to process information - a library.

As yet, only limited resources are available to meet this fast growing demand. Funding must usually be garnered from other programs. Professionally qualified Indian librarians and trained Indian technicians are in critically short supply. Books and other informational resources still contain racist information. Experience in developing programs and services which meet the local community's needs is slight. Specific sensitivity to Indian ways and alternatives is just developing as library and information services develop in Indian communities.

The purpose of these guides is to provide initial direction and provide alternatives to those planning or engaged in developing Indian library and information systems. Each guide discusses basic policies, initial steps, or discreet activities that appear to be essential to successful Indian library service. Each guide gives the reader basic direction and alternatives for development in his locale.

The reader is strongly advised to recognize these guides for what they are - ideas and programs that have been successful in the communities where they are used. They will not solve all the problems of Indian library service. They will provide the reader with some ideas, programs, and concepts to be considered in light of informational needs in the specific Indian community to be served.

Three basic types of information are presented in the guides: societal coping skills, basic considerations for implementation; and descriptions of services unique or critical to Indian libraries. These guides are supplemented by the Appalachian Adult Education Center's, Library Service Guides. The excellent Appalachian guides deal primarily with services in small communities.

Coping skills are given in two guides, (#'s 1 and 2). Organization and implementation will be discussed in five of the guides (#0,3,9,10, & 11) which cover: funding, organization, assessing needs, materials selection, and training. Five guides will discuss services unique or critical to Indian Library Service (#4,5,6,7, & 8). These guides cover: cataloging, urban services, adult education, program elements, and information services.

Charles Townley, Editor

ED108786

Locally Generated Information and Referral Services in Indian Libraries

Charles Townley

Guide 8

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I. DEFINITIONS

Information Center as used in this guide will refer to a collection of information in all physical formats on social, educational, and health services, other survival information, and facts regarding current issues and concerns in the local community. It is staffed by personnel whose functions are collect, organize, update and disseminate this information to the community and answer the specific requests of individuals. The goal of the information center is to provide community residents with accurate information on issues and programs of local concern thereby reducing individual frustration and improving effectiveness of service agencies.

Indian Library as used in this guide refers to any organization or agency in an Indian community that exists to create, collect, organize, and disseminate information to that community. It may also be known as a culture center or media center.

Indian Communities are those groups of Indian people who live together in community and identify themselves as a tribe, an organization or group. Examples of Indian communities are reservations, rural communities, and urban area populations.

II. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

A primary concern of Indian people is the availability of dependable information on those issues and programs that directly affect their day to day lives. Accurate information is often difficult to obtain in Indian communities due to the divide and conquer mentality that has resulted in a plethora of federal, state, and tribal programs, each with a specific objective sometimes at cross-purposes or duplicative sponsored by largely autonomous organizations with little or no overall organization or control. Also, as in most small communities, there is a tendency to rely on person to person communication or the moccasin telegraph which distorts information on current community issues and concerns, thereby causing tension and bad feelings.

Most Indian people are frustrated and concerned about this confusion resulting from bureaucratic "white" tape, lack of organization and faulty communication in the community. Recently some significant efforts have been made to create order in the Indian bureaucracy. Also large scale communication systems are being developed, through use of the media and other devices. Reliable person to person communication awaits the implementation of information services.

As the community information agency, the library has a key role to play in improving access to local information. The library should concern itself with meeting the informational needs of individuals, the grass roots, by collecting, organizing, and disseminating information on local programs and issues, as they

presently exist, in the most objective and efficient means possible. Being an information center or source is a normal role for a library. For a long time, people have used libraries to answer their routine questions. For example, repairing the car, fixing the plumbing, or getting information on their favorite sports. The only change is that instead of using books or other commercially available resources, unique and constantly changing situations in most Indian communities requires that the library use the community as both the source and the recipient of information.

III. PLANNING

In order to develop a successful information center, sound planning is required. Several questions should be answered before operations begin. Some of these are: What types of information are vital to the community? Where is this information located? What information is necessary? How should this information be collected? How should the information be organized and stored? What methods will be used to disseminate this information in the community?

IV. TYPES OF INFORMATION

The first task in planning an information center is to determine the locally available information that people in the community require. If the community has an assessment of informational needs, the answer to this question will be readily available. Otherwise, people from various parts of the community should be asked for their opinions. Also agencies should be questioned to determine the kinds of questions that they are most often asked. Information needs assessment that have been made in several Indian communities suggest the following areas of possible interest:

1. information on social services offered by federal, state, local, and tribal agencies.

2. information on educational opportunities, including adult and vocational education.

3. information on health services, including nutrition, alcoholism, and drug abuse.

4. information on public service, fraternal, and religious groups and organizations.

5. information on legal and civil rights as well as regulations such as equal opportunity requirements and taxes.

6. accurate information on community issues and problems, including tribal council actions, personnel changes, and local events.

All of this information is essentially local in its origin and application. It is not readily available from one source in

most Indian communities. Nor does its constantly changing nature allow it to be codified and printed as a final answer for all time. If community residents are to have access to this information from one source, that source must be an information center.

V. LOCATION OF INFORMATION

The next step is to determine which people and organizations will be contacted to provide the needed information. Some, such as PHS and the BIA Education Office, are obvious. Others are carefully or inadvertently hidden and will require a great deal of effort to find. The best procedure in this case is to use the best judgement of the staff in developing an initial list of sources. This list should be corrected and added to as you find new sources of information or drop old sources. It should be continually maintained and updated. Some people prefer to maintain a list, others a card file. Use the method that is best for you, but keep a list that is up to date.

VI. WHAT INFORMATION TO COLLECT

When a program or issue of interest is identified, some basic information must be obtained. While each program is likely to be different, there are common features which will be needed by the information center. Some of these are:

Name of agency or program:

Address:

Phone number:

Name of responsible person:

Brief description of the purpose or services offered by the program.

Eligibility and/or requirements for participation:

Signature of agency official attesting the accuracy of information:

Date prepared:

If the agency or program has any brochures about its services, application forms, instructions, etc., these are also useful. It is a good idea to prepare a standard data sheet using an 5 x 8 card or 8½ x 11 piece of paper including the information above and use it to collect and store the information. Experience indicates that the best way to collect this information is to inform the agency of your interest, make an appointment to meet with a responsible staff member of the agency, send out staff to conduct interviews, prepare a data sheet to use in the center, and ask the agency to authenticate its accuracy. This method has the advantage that the staff gains first hand experience in the

role of the agency and will be able to make better referrals. Also the agency will have a positive feeling because it has provided the information directly and has approved the summary to be used. Agencies and programs should be sent a copy of the standard data sheet regularly for revision and updating required by internal changes.

Information on current issues is more difficult to come by. It might include such items as a proposed lease, a court case, a pending tribal council action, or any other information of interest to the local community. The primary goals of the center in dealing with these issues should be to identity them quickly, get information on them from those people closest to the source(s) and insure objectivity by including divergent opinions from all points of view involved. The basic information to be collected is:

Name of issue:

Objective description of what has occurred to date:

Opinions of parties involved:

Names, addresses, and phone numbers of people or agencies involved:

Once again, it is a wise idea to prepare and use a standard data form to collect and store this information. As issues are identified, staff members should begin to collect information from all the parties involved. In this effort as well as disseminating information it is critical that staff keep their personal opinions to themselves and attempt to maintain maximum objectivity.

VII. ORGANIZATION AND STORAGE OF INFORMATION

An information center must be organized in order to be useful. If you can't find information rapidly when you need it, you might just as well not collected it. The standard data forms described above are the first step. They will insure that approximately the same type of information is collected on all programs or issues. It is recommended that forms for programs and services be kept in separate files from those on current issues. This is necessary because of the different types of information contained and the fact that the issues file requires more frequent weeding, correction and addition. Supplementary information, such as application forms for programs, newspaper articles, and documents relating to current issues should be separately maintained in a file cabinet.

Both data files and files of supplementary information should be arranged by subject to facilitate access. Following is an organizational scheme developed for a program and services file on the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation:

A. Government

1. Tribal Offices and Programs
2. Federal Offices and Programs
3. County Offices and Programs
4. State Offices and Programs

B. Education
1. Schools
2. Adult, Basic, Vocational, and Other

C. Social Services
1. Clubs
2. Health Services
3. Law Enforcement
4. Religious Institutions

C. Business and Private Sector

This organizational scheme is presented only as an example. Although it has worked well for the Standing Rock Tribal Library, other Indian communities will have other programs and requirements.

Organizing the current issues file and its supplementary information is more difficult. It is suggested that a subject arrangement, alphabetized according to topic be used. Examples might be; civil rights, elections, equal opportunity, housing, or water rights. General headings, such as rumors, pending tribal council business, might also be used. The one cardinal rule is to make the organization flexible enough to meet any contingency. The same organizational system should be used both for the issues file and its supplementary information.

One way to maintain some semblance of order is to keep a list of the subjects that you use. By keeping this list handy when you are organizing new information, you will have a pretty good idea of whether to use an existing category or make a new one. If you do decide to make a new category, add it to the list immediately so that you won't forget it. While you may think this is duplicative work at first, you will be happy that you did it once the information center grows to any appreciable size.

VIII. METHODS OF DISSEMINATION

The payoff of an information center comes in providing people with the information that they require. Consequently, it is not enough to simply open the door one day and announce that henceforth the library will supply the local information needs of the community. Carefully planned programs of dissemination and public relations are required.

In the public relations area, residents must be made aware that an information center focusing on local programs and concerns does exist. Further, people must be encouraged to use it. Prospective users must be made to feel comfortable and anonymous in using the information center. If they think their use of the

information center will be reported, they will forego using it. The staff is the key to public relations efforts. They should attend community meetings to explain the purpose of the center and encourage the community to use it. The staff might also set up a demonstration at a local event like a pow-wow or rodeo. They should also explain that any questions asked or answers given will be done in strictest confidence. Residents should also be encouraged to feed in information on a regular basis. If these conditions are met, most community members will gladly include the use of the center in their day to day existence.

Two types of information can be disseminated from the center, that designed for individuals and that intended for groups. The key in serving individuals is access. The services of the center should be available when the majority of people can use it. This includes evenings and weekends. Drop-in visits should be encouraged. Telephone service is essential. Staff might arrange a hot line with the phone company. This number should also be broadly circulated in the community by means of posters and self-adhesive labels to put on the phone itself. The staff should also be prepared to handle write-in questions. In all cases questions should be answered politely and as rapidly as possible. Individuals should not be frustrated due to lack of an answer. If the information center does not have it, it should get it as soon as possible.

Several types of broad scale dissemination are possible. Use of any of them is dependent on the cultural factors of the community involved, the facilities available to the information center and staff abilities and time. In many cases one or more of the following methods might be desirable.

Newsletters are successfully used by several Indian libraries. In order to be successful, they should be published frequently and distributed broadly at no charge, either by direct mail or heavily trafficked community areas (i.e. trading post, tribal offices, post office). Newsletters should deal primarily with local concerns, issues, and programs. While, such newsletters should be clear and easy to read, one can use inexpensive means of reproduction.

Directories are useful as an introductory or summative method of distributing information on most or some programs and services available to the community. Such directories normally summarize available services, give eligibility, and provide names, addresses, and phone numbers. If used they should be provided free of charge to each household. Directories are limited in that they eventually go out of date.

Calendars have been found useful in many information centers. Published monthly, they list important dates and meetings. Some also include brief information on programs and services. Like the newsletter, they also should be free and broadly distributed to insure maximum effectiveness.

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Television and radio are both excellent methods to disseminate information vital to the community's well being. The information center can use these opportunities to notify the community of upcoming events, opportunities in programs and services, and explore community issues. Radio or television time can sometimes be free. Educational stations are often very willing to provide it. Commercial stations are also required to have a certain amount of free public service broadcasting time. A determined search will frequently result in obtaining time. If the tribe or organization has such time, the information center is the logical unit to prepare announcements of community services and events.

Video and audio tapes are useful if a significant part of the community has access to the equipment required to operate them. Using this media the staff can prepare information and give in-depth reports on current issues much as can be done on radio or television. In addition, it can also include more people in the decision making process by recording and playing back tribal council sessions.

IX. DO'S AND DON'TS

Dos

1. Do be objective. Try to present all sides of a question, regardless of your own opinion.

2. Do be confidential. The sources of opinion on local issues should remain secret. Questions asked by individuals should not be discussed with friends or relations.

3. Do be as accurate as possible. Check questionable information with authoritative sources.

4. Do encourage people to use the center by being helpful. Often people just need help in formulating their questions. Take the time to discuss their concerns.

5. Do admit it if you don't have an answer. Then offer to get the information as soon as possible.

Don'ts

1. Don't think that your opinion is the only correct one. Be open and communicate the opinions of others, even if you do not agree with them.

2. Don't be short tempered with people.

3. Don't circulate unsubstantiated rumors. Check out their input with an authoritative source.

4. Don't be caught short. Keep your ear to the ground to identify new issues and programs. Collect information on them as soon as possible.

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